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CONTRIBUTION TO NIE 13-60 - COMMUNIST CHINA

There is ample evidence that Communist China is acquiring the beginnings of an atomic energy program, and there is a large body of official statements which confirm that Communist China aspires to a nuclear weapons capability.

There is firm evidence of joint Soviet-Chinese exploitation of China's uranium resources since 1950 when an organized effort was initiated. The effort was increased under Chinese auspices in 1954-1955, and they are now working over ten uranium deposits. We estimate that enough ore is now mined to produce several hundred tons of equivalent recoverable uranium metal per year. However, they have probably acquired only recently the facilities for processing uranium ores into metal. Although they could have sufficient uranium metal to support plutonium production reactor operations by 1961, we have no intelligence indicating that construction of such a production reactor has been initiated. Chinese attainment of the capability to detonate their own nuclear device in the near term, say within two or three years, rests almost entirely upon the nature and extent of Soviet aid. If Soviet aid continues at its present apparent pace and character, the Chinese might attain the capability to detonate their own nuclear device by about 1964. However, if the Soviets have, in response to Chinese pressure, provided a great deal more aid than we have detected, a nuclear device of Chinese manufacture might be detonated a year or two earlier. Given direct Soviet supply of designs and fissionable material, and assistance in fabrication of the device, a nuclear detonation could be produced in China at almost any time in the immediate future. Even after the Chinese do test a device, it would take them several additional years to produce a small stockpile of weapons, since they do not possess the requisite highly advanced scientific, technical, and industrial establishment.

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